



King County

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CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

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King County Charter Review Commission
Rural/Local Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes – November 8, 2007
KC Chinook Bldg., 5:30pm-7:30pm

The meeting of the King County Charter Review Commission, Rural/Local Subcommittee was called to order at 5:30 pm by Co-Chair John Jensen.

Commission members in attendance:

John Jensen
Terry Lavender
Jim English
Gary Long
Alan Munro

Absent:

John Groen
Tara Jo Heinecke
Mike Lowry

Staff :

Corrie Watterson Bryant, Project Manager, Charter Review Commission
Rebecca Spithill, Project Manager, Charter Review Commission

Council and PAO Staff:

Rebecha Cusack, King County Council
Jennifer Stacey, Prosecuting Attorney's Office

1. Guest Speakers

John introduced Stephanie Warden, Director, KC Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES).

Ms. Warden will be speaking on 4 topics: 1) enhanced customer service issues and programs at DDES; 2) some of the perceptions of customer service at DDES; 3) concern about equitable handling of code enforcements and permit review; and 4) changes recommended to the charter review commission that can better serve DDES customers. As background, DDES is a regulatory agency that serves unincorporated King County which is about 350,000 residents and

of that 140,000 residents are rural. DDES is responsible for long range planning which is reviewing the King County comprehensive plan making sure the policies and regulations are in compliance with the Growth Management Act; all permitting in unincorporated King County which includes plan review, inspections and all aspects of permit review; the fire marshal's office which includes permit review for compliance to the fire code and an arson inspection group; and also responsible for land use code enforcement.

1) DDES has worked hard at implementing a process that's transparent, accountable, respectful to people, do a good job in educating people so they understand why these regulations exist, and helping them through the regulatory process. Zoning codes, drainage manuals, and road standards are cumbersome, thick volumes and it is difficult for staff to be familiar with every regulation in them. But, the expectation of the average layperson to come in with an application that is in compliance with all those regulations is a very high standard and it becomes incumbent on DDES to provide the best service, the best public information and really help people through the process. Their customers range from the small "mom & pop" doing a one-time project to the sophisticated developer with all the technical pieces in place, so DDES has to provide a service that responds to all those elements.

In terms of enhanced customer service, the department has developed a project management program that provides for more accountability and predictability. This program will provide an upfront fee estimate for permit customers and a single point of contact – a project manager who makes sure that all the different requirements are met and helps with troubleshooting. This program was started a couple of years ago and it's been successful but there is still room for improvement. Also done a lot of work updating the department's website by providing better informational materials, forms on line that can be submitted on line, a permit tracking system that customers can access to see the status of their permits.

During certain hours of the day, the department conducts a technical assistant, at no cost, in which customers can come in and talk in-depth with any technical staff about their project. There is also 2 staff that will give assistance on critical areas and will help people with any aspect of their project. There is now a health dept. assistant that comes to the DDES office 2 mornings a week to answer basic questions on their permitting process and policies. The department is trying to move toward a "one stop shopping" service for their customers. The department also is offering free technical assistance, along with the Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP), on rural stewardship, forestry and farm plans in preparing plans for long term stewardship goals which may provide much more flexibility in critical areas regulations and provides a feasibility study on their project.

Non-residential and land use permits in the agriculture zones currently receive reduced fees and there is pending legislation before the council to expand these reduced fees to people in the rural areas who are doing agricultural related buildings. An agricultural review team made up of staff from different agencies meet to discuss agricultural activities in unincorporated King County specific to permitting issues. Also included in the group is a representative from King Conservation District. They are the group that does all the farm planning. The department coordinates with the group on a lot of projects but mostly the Ag issues.

A Rural Permit Coordinator position was created recently to assist rural property owners with permit issues. This person works a lot with one-time applicants and permit applicants via code enforcement cases (after the fact permitting) in helping them to understand the process requirements. This person also coordinates with the different disciplines that the process needs to go through.

DDES is conducting public workshops to educate and assist property owners in the permitting process.

2) In general, DDES does care about public perception and tries to listen to the public and try to be responsive by developing and improving on areas that can better service their customers. The review and adoption of the Critical Areas Ordinance may have been a most contentious time between the county and the public over the changes made in regulatory process but it does allow for more flexibility in meeting the new regulations than the old regulations of the Sensitive Areas Regulations. The department has been able to streamline some of the processes and be more flexible with those processes which, has made it easier for some people to meet the regulations.

DDES has been doing customer surveys through a contracted independent market survey service for about 3 years and overall findings have shown an improvement on an annual basis in terms of customer service. A 2007 survey shows that 87% have ranked DDES' service as satisfactory or above. 87% ranked DDES as satisfactory or above in making fair decisions. On a scale of 1-5, DDES ranked a 4.42 average for being courteous and professional. The survey also shows where improvements can be made, i.e. responding to telephone calls.

Other ways the agency is striving for service improvements is to meet with various stakeholders on a regular basis – the UAC, the Masterbuilders, the fire chiefs and commissioners, environmental organizations and will meet on an as needed basis with community organizations. There is a statutory timeline for permit reviews which staff is held accountable and since DDES is a self-supporting agency with minimum general revenue funding, staff is also held accountable for efficiencies in revenue such as billable hours.

3) As a tool for equitable handling of code enforcement, there is a fee waver process in place for applicants to appeal the fees they feel are overcharged or unnecessary. Legislation will be going before council to create a new administrative appeal process for fees that are being disputed and appeals will be heard by the KC Hearing Examiner which is considered an independent, third party.

Code enforcement now operate under "Standard Operating Procedures"(SOP) which were actually written by staff so that staff would take ownership of the procedures and covers a broad range of procedures. Council recently forwarded an ordinance that codifies the SOP. Code enforcement officers are geographically assigned and are encouraged to become involved in the community they are serving by attending local community organization meetings. This helps in being aware of different priority needs and respectful of those needs.

The goal is to work cooperatively with the property owner to voluntarily come to code compliance but it sometimes becomes difficult, for different reasons, for owners to under the violations of code compliance. DDES still needs to improve their educational information to the general public. The PAO has assigned 2 full-time prosecuting attorneys to prosecute code enforcement cases which has helped tremendously in effectively moving cases through the system.

4) DDES really has no changes to the charter.

Q & A

Permit services are running about 60% urban and 40% rural. As unincorporated areas become annexed, the bulk of permitting will probably become more rural service provider.

The department has looked at creating a rural only department but felt there was a potential for a lot of inefficiencies because it may become hard to divide expertise in some areas, i.e. streams which are both in rural and urban areas. It may also become hard to be responsive to the wide mix of permit issues with very different needs that are handled now.

Subarea planning on the website is a more focused land use change rather than a broader focus so the public input would come from specific locations that the plan affects.

DDES works closely with the council to ensure that proposed regulations work in concert with other regulations and are adopted informatively and thoughtfully. It's incumbent upon DDES to try to figure out what issue the council is trying to solve and to come up with resolutions that make sense for that regulation.

During the free technical assistance, people can call in to discuss their plans but it becomes difficult to have an in-depth conversation regarding those plans if the technician can't see them.

DDES does have concurrency standards requiring developers to meet area and infrastructure standards of the cities and in some cases may even exceed those standards. This helps in ensuring that when those areas are annexed, grids match up and the infrastructure standards are met.

ACTION: Stephanie will get some numbers to Corrie that Alan is interested in on rural areas.

2. Rural Governance

Corrie gave a brief background on the past & current governance committees for the unincorporated rural areas and why they were created. Over time the county has been trying to move people in urban unincorporated areas into cities and incur incorporation. When the initiative is completed, that will leave about 20,000 residents in urban unincorporated areas and the county will be a local service provider only to rural areas.

Currently, although there are rural services provided by an array of different agencies in KC, there is only a handful of staff that provides top level, broad-based thinking. There is currently not a council committee that is specifically dedicated to representing unincorporated areas. The UAC's have about 114,000 voters in their combined 6 UAC geography which makes up about 31% of the rural unincorporated residents. That means there are still 70% of the residents that aren't represented at a UAC.

A fairly common feeling from the public is that KC needs to establish a more equitable and responsive representation of the unincorporated areas residents. Another common comment is protecting the rural lifestyle and protecting them from development.

Corrie reviewed the list of options to consider:

- Strengthen the UAC's: adding more community service representatives, greater voice in planning, encourage the development of new UACs. The subcommittee could recommend that the county do more outreach to educate and inform residents about the UAC's and how they serve the residents. There was some discussion on the Fall City effort of forming a UAC and clarification on the difference between a UAC and UAD.
- Reduced role in policy making for UAC's.
- Creating a Rural Unincorporated Affairs department to sit somewhere in the Executive office.
- Create subarea planning process to give constituents more of a voice in the community's future and can help resolve conflicts in open space planning.
- Creation of a Township which would cover all areas of unincorporated areas and relieve the county of both regional and rural duties. But, according to State law, counties do not currently have authority to form townships.
- Create a standing advisory council which would be a point of contact for residents but may not be a permanent fixture.
- Adding staff for councilmembers that would work specifically on regional and local services.
- Implementation of a rural services initiative proposed by the Executive for 2008 which would create a rural subcabinet that would be included in the cabinet leadership.
- Last option – don't do anything.

There was some discussion on the proposed rural services initiative. The co-chairs of the subcommittee felt there was a true lack of communication and respect on the work they are doing for the county from the Executive's office senior management staff. This proposal was not shared by them but was shared with the committee by council staff. This initiative will be part of the budget and is still under discussion in council. Timeline for adoption of the budget is the Monday before Thanksgiving, so, Rebecha will keep the committee staff informed on what may be coming out in the chair striker.

Planning commission option was missed. It's suggested that the planning committee would be able to sort out the different ideas and opinions on land use issues. It would be a truly sanctioned

body able to make decisions that would be representative of the community it makes decisions over and may not be as cumbersome as some other options.

ACTION: Corrie to do some research on the subject and investigate the options. Rebecha suggests that the PAO office also investigate the legal side of the issue as State law may have changed the county's role.

3. Open Space Amendment

The amendment hasn't had a chance to be fully formed or vetted yet. There are still little things in the amendment that needs to be cleaned up. The amendment will be going before the KCCF Open Space Committee in January which does most of the conservation futures review in the county and the committee has not even looked at this yet. Terry suggests that the discussion be tabled until January when the subcommittee can have a final document in front of them.

It was agreed to table until January.

Next meeting: Tuesday, December 4, 2007 with a possibility of setting an extra meeting in January, 2008. No guest speakers are slated at this time so can vet through the rural governance.

John adjourned the meeting at: 7:48 pm

Respectfully submitted by Charlotte Ohashi